

Statement from Congressman Ron Kind  
Supporting H.R. 1591, the U.S. Troop Readiness,  
Veterans' Health and Iraq Accountability Act of 2007  
March 22, 2007

Madame Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1591, the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health, and Iraq Accountability Act of 2007.

It is time for a new direction in Iraq. We cannot continue to ask our troops to baby-sit a civil war. With our help, the Iraqis have established a coalition government, and we have trained more than 250,000 Iraqi Security Forces. We must now send a message to them that the patience of the American people is not endless, and that the Iraqi people must take control of their future by making the tough political compromises essential to living in peace. In short, it is time to take the training wheels off.

The bill before us today achieves the goal of redeployment of U.S. forces by setting specific benchmarks of progress using for the Iraqis and President's own benchmarks for success. If these benchmarks cannot be met, then the bill provides for a systematic approach for withdrawal of our troops.

Although I have had concerns about setting a date certain for withdrawal, a responsible timeline will work to hold the Iraqi government accountable for much-needed and overdue progress. Essentially, this is a timeline on the Iraqis to come together and take control of their country.

The proposals included in this bill are truly a new direction, rather than just more of the same. By calling for a responsible, phased redeployment of our troops out of Iraq, this bill allows us to re-focus our military efforts in Afghanistan.

I am increasingly concerned that the main threat against the United States, al Qaeda, is still a global threat with global reach, and that the person who was directly responsible for 9/11, Osama Bin Laden, is still at large. The President has taken his eye off the ball in Afghanistan and is not doing everything in his power to bring those responsible for 9/11 to justice. It sends a terrible message to would-be terrorists who may be interested in striking us that all they have to do is go in hiding and lie low until we get distracted on another adventure. I am hopeful that this supplemental appropriations bill sends a signal to the President that he needs to reassess his priorities.

Our men and women in the armed forces are to be commended for the terrific job they do for us across the globe each and every day, often in very difficult and dangerous circumstances. They deserve a clearer mission, they deserve to have the training and equipment they need to complete

that mission, and they deserve the best care when they return home with physical and emotional wounds. The supplemental provides for all these needs.

During my three visits to Iraq, I met with our Military command, troops in the field, and numerous Iraqi leaders and civilians. I can honestly say that nothing has made me prouder to be an American than seeing the performance of our troops in the field. They are well-trained, well-motivated and an inspiration to us all. They are, in short, the best America has to offer.

In particular, active military, Guard, and Reserve forces from western Wisconsin have answered the call to service. I have been to many deployment ceremonies and witnessed the anguish in the hearts and faces of family and friends as they say goodbye to their loved ones being sent abroad for lengthy stays. I have also been to several welcome home ceremonies to honor their service and to thank them for their sacrifice.

Sadly, I have also had 18 military funerals in my Congressional district alone, most of which I have personally attended. If I don't have to attend another military funeral, if I don't have to pick up the phone to call another grieving family, I will be one of the happiest people in the world. They are a constant reminder of the human toll this war is having, not only with our troops but also with their families and our communities. There is not a day that goes by when I am not concerned about the safety and welfare of our troops.

A new direction, not an escalation, is what is needed in Iraq. We have now been in Iraq longer than the entire Second World War. The supplemental provides that new direction – one where the Iraqis assume responsibility for their future, and the U.S. starts to redeploy our troops and strengthen our military that is stretched too thin and on the verge of breaking. “More of the same,” or “staying the course,” is not an option.

Once again I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks and undying admiration for our men and women in uniform for their service to our country. May God bless them and their families during this difficult time. May God provide his special blessings and care for those who fell in the line of duty. And may God continue to bless these United States of America.